

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the phenomena of culture and development interface at various critical levels and that there is general agreement that a vital link exists between the two. Using cross-country examples it shows that this link has been vital to the development strides made in Europe, North America and Japan. Taking Nigeria as a case study, the paper argues that the Nigeria “design for living”, that is, her culture has consistently frustrated development efforts in the country. This is as a result of the impunity that has characterized the country’s culture. The paper advocates a complete change in the typical Nigerian attitude to things. This would be the only sure way of overcoming the country’s throes of (under) development.

KEYWORDS: Culture, attitude, design for living, Nigeria, general agreement

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of culture and development are intimately related. This is to the extent that the two go hand in hand in the process of nations advancement. There is a sense in which culture taken as a people’s way of life cannot be divorced from the process of development of any nation. This probably informs S.G. Egwu’s position that “it is widely recognized that culture and the process of development interface at several levels (Egwu, 2007). This interface between culture and development is because:

Culture is fundamental to human existence and human civilization, embodying in its dynamism, the totality of a peoples response to the challenges of life, and living in a (any) living environment. Culture offers meaning, purpose and value to the socio-economic political and aesthetic ethos of society (Obafemi, 2005:2-3).

This paper interrogates the relationship between culture and national development using Nigeria as a case study. It examines culture especially its dynamic nature and how this could be a basis for the development of Nigeria. Unfortunately Nigerian culture, that is, its design for living, has been such that has not promoted or enhanced development efforts. It advocates the urgent need to reverse this trend.

Conceptual Clarification

A. Culture

Culture according to the famous Nigerian social anthropologist Ikenna Nzimiro is “the way people do their things” (In Igwe, 2007:100). This seemingly simplistic definition is a forceful expression in a few words of the universality of culture and its enormous influence on the lives of all men. (Igwe, 2007). In a similar vein, Ralph Linton sees the culture of society as the way of life of its members: the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation (in Haralambos, 1980). Clyde Kluckhohn in his elegant phraseology sees culture as a “design for living” held by members of a particular society (in Haralambos, 1980:3).

There are two things that are clear from the definitions above. First culture is learned and second it is shared. Most of the definitions or conceptions of culture today are based to a great extent on the definition given by Edward Tylor in 1871 in which he referred to culture as a learned complex of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and custom. What the definition implies is that culture and civilization are one and the same.

This is the point from which the link between culture and development can be made. It may be stated with some high level of certainty, as we will be showing shortly in this paper that *there is a vital link between a people's culture and the development strides they make or do not make!* (Obafemi, 2005; Egwu, 2007).

One thing that has to be made clear at this point is that culture is dynamic, it changes and it varies from society to society. Even within the same society, culture changes and varies over time. This classification is necessary because it helps to do away with misunderstanding, which occurs as a result of differences in culture. For example, what may be culturally accepted in society A may be abomination in society B. The following example given by Edward T. Hall provides a vivid illustration. Two individuals, one from North America, the other from South America are conversing in a hall forty foot long. They begin at one end of the hall and finish at the other end, the North American steadily retreating, the South American relentlessly advancing, each trying to establish the accustomed conversation distance defined by his culture. To the North American, his South American counterpart comes too close for comfort whereas the South American feels uneasy conversing at the distance his partner demands. (in Haralambos, 1980). Often it takes meeting such as this to reveal the pervasive nature of culturally determined behaviour. In every discussion on culture, a distinction is also made between material and non-material culture and/or tangible and non-tangible elements of the phenomenon.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we conceive of culture in the paper as the way and manner any group of people conduct their affairs. It is needless to add that the way people conduct their affairs vary from one society to another and that what is acceptable in society A may be anathema in society B. It is also worthy of note that even in the same society, the standard for the conduct of affairs changes over time. It is thus the case that culture varies from one society to the other and even within the same society varies over time.

B. Development

The issue of development is one that is paramount to man. All discussions on development must of necessity begin with and end with man. (Dunmoye, 1994). Development connotes among other things progress, changes in all aspects of man's life. It is needless to add that these change and progress should be positive (Egwemi, 2007). When the term development is prefixed by the word *national*, it means that we are talking of development as it relates to a particular nation and in this case the Nigerian nation. National development as it is conceived in Nigeria's second national development plan is about the establishment of a viable and buoyant national economy, the establishment of a just and egalitarian society, the enthronement of equality and social justice and the building of a unified and integrated society where the different ethnicities, religions and geo-political identities develop a collective sense of imagination that they are one. (in Egwu, 2007).

Development represents the infinite struggle between man and his environment in which man seeks to understand his physical, social, biological and political environment, exert control over them and use the knowledge to advance the cause of humanity. But it is a dialectical struggle in which man seeks to control his environment through greater knowledge with the dual aim of transforming livelihood as well as the transformation of the environment in such a manner that development becomes sustainable. Development becomes sustainable when it factors in the interests of future generations in the utilization of available resources. (Egwu, 2007).

From this conception of national development, it is clear that the road to its attainment is not an easy one. *It would require the harnessing of energies such that the goal is first determined, secondly actualized and most importantly sustained.* There is almost universal agreement that Nigeria is confronted by a crises of development. The issues that have hindered the achievement of development in Nigeria are myriad and complex. They includes among others, the cultural heritage, ethnic and religious crisis, corruption, political crisis and instability and the failure to investigate and understand the link between culture and development. (See Mundt and Aborishade, 2004, Egwu, 2007).

So far, we have pursued the argument that there is a link between peoples culture and national development. This means for instance that there is a link between the culture of Nigeria and her lack of development. This does not mean that nothing can be done. We have already shown that culture is dynamic and is subject to change. We are proposing here a need to radically change the culture of Nigeria so that she would be in better position to pursue and attain national development.

It is widely acknowledged that Nigeria is facing a huge crisis of national development (Egwu, 2007). This crisis according to Egwu resonates in the following:

1. The long and protracted economic crisis and the reality of poverty inducing growth.
2. The weakening of national identity resulting from opportunistic exploitation of ethnic, regional and religious identities as well as the political conflicts generated by the crisis of citizenship that has bifurcated people on the basis of indigenes and settlers.
3. The loss of national cultural identifies as a result of the pressures of globalization and unrestrained exposure to foreign cultural influences and technology.
4. The weakening ties of the family and the corresponding loss of values such as honour, integrity and hard work.
5. Gender inequity and the undue marginalization of the women folk in the decision making processes and institutions. (Egwu, 2007).

According to Egwu, one can go on and on to enumerate the various ramifications of the crisis of national development in contemporary Nigeria. But more importantly a glimpse into the few examples above draws attention, not only to the link between culture and development but even more worrying, to the possibility that culture can be used in negative ways by the power holders to achieve their narrow interests as shown in the issues of exclusion of women and the politicization of ethnic and religious identities. At this critical point that the policy makers are responding to the challenges of national development and are involved in the search for an alternative development paradigm, it is useful to explore how culture can become a relevant instrument of development. As the history of development has shown in Europe and the societies of the Far East including Japan and China, culture can hardly be divorced from development.

Culture and Development: Example from other climes

S.G. Egwu has undertaken the following discussion on the potential and actual influence of culture on the development efforts across different climes. He begins the discussion with Amilcar Cabral, one of the foremost African political thinkers and the leader of anti-colonial resistance against Portuguese colonialism in Guinea Bissau and the Island of Cape Verde who provides what may be regarded as the nexus between culture and development. Cabral's point of departure was that any theory of national emancipation must be materially based in the reality of every country. He argues that foreign domination is only possible and sustainable through a permanent and organized control of the cultural life of such a people. It is on this basis that Cabral arrived at the profound conclusion that *culture cultures* development.

The German sociologist, Max Weber, convincingly argued that the triumph of capitalism as an economic and social system in Europe especially England was a consequence of what he called the "Protestant Ethic". Thus, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber sought to explain the rise of capitalism in terms of the culture of frugality and the notion of saving today for the enjoyment of tomorrow which was central to Christian doctrine. Although the Weberian analysis of the role of values in the emergence of capitalism has stirred considerable controversy in the contemporary world, particularly in the light of the recent success of market economies in non-protestant and even non-Christian societies, the essence of his pioneering work is not lost on the present generation.

The massive industrial and economic progress attained by the countries of South East Asia and the Far East is somehow attributed to values that are traditional to that region. In other words, it is assumed that the cultural values of these societies that have supplied the engine of development are different from traditional

Western morals.

The extremely interesting case of the role of Japanese culture and values in the rise of Japan to the status of a world industrial power provides a lesson in terms of the culture-development nexus. There appears to be a reasonable consensus that a combination of behavioural norms with practical business has certainly played a major part in Japan's astonishing economic success which has transformed a backward economy to progress by questioning the assumed universalist view that the austere and somewhat unforgiving morality of "protestant" ethic, including its self-centrism, provides the most effective way of achieving economic progress. Japan tried to do it differently and did this exceedingly well. It drew on a different class of moral values in economic operations which emphasized group responsibility, company loyalty, interpersonal trust and implicit contracts that bind individual conduct. There seems to be considerable evidence that the use of these values was quite important in Japan's spectacular achievements and rapid elevation to economic pre-eminence in the world. However, education and pedagogy are also mentioned alongside the role of cultural values and ethics.

Interestingly, culture has not been completely missing in the African discourse regarding development and progress. It is so in the strong sense in which cultural issues have been planted at the centre of the regime of rights that Africans must advance and protect. *The African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights* acceded to by African leaders and heads of state in Banjul, The Gambia, in 1991, particularly called for the preservation and strengthening of positive African values in the relations between people in the society especially those that relate to tolerance, dialogue and consultation.

Indeed, it is globally recognized that the quest for development in any country is incomplete without due regard to the promotion of the cultural rights of the various elements of the society especially the ethnic minorities and the endangered groups. Consequently, cultural rights are problematised to include a group's ability to preserve its way of life such as child rearing, continuation of language, and security of its economic base in the nation. The cultural rights movements which have emerged across the world to promote and defend cultural rights have justified their activities in terms of the need to preserve traditional cultural knowledge that has commercial value like ethno-medicine, cosmetics, cultivated plants, foods, folklore, arts, crafts dances, songs, costumes and rituals. (Egwu, 2007).

Culture contributes to core development objectives by helping to:

- ⇒ Provide new opportunities for poor communities to generate incomes from their own cultural knowledge
- ⇒ Catalyze local-level development through communities using their diverse social, culture and economic resources.
- ⇒ Conserve and generate revenues from existing assets that is, reviving city centres, conserving natural resources and generating sustainable tourism revenues.
- ⇒ Diversify strategies of human development and capacity building for knowledge based, dynamic societies e.g. through support to local publishing, library and museum services, (<http://inweb18.worldbank.org/LAC,11/29/2007>).

The point therefore is that Nigeria can borrow from the examples of other countries that have addressed core challenges of development by factoring cultural issues and values in the policy making process.

Nigerian Culture and Development

Having gone to this length to show the relationship between culture and development it is imperative to ask at this point, in what ways has Nigerian culture hindered or propelled her development efforts?

Nigeria is an *underdeveloped* or *developing* country depending on one's perception of the situation. This is paradoxical because Nigeria is very rich in natural resources, it is only unfortunate that her leaders have not been alive to their responsibilities to the country. As one of Nigeria's leading novelist has argued forcefully: "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely the failure of leadership". (Achebe, 1983). This simply means that Nigeria has developed a culture of leadership failure. (Egwemi, 2008).

This crisis of leadership has left Nigeria in the doldrums and has made it perpetually a country of the future (Obasanjo, 1994). Nigeria's leadership crisis is compounded by the attitude of the followership even though this may also be an extension of the failure of leadership. (Egwemi, 2008).

Nigeria's poor leadership culture is at the heart of her development crises. Other aspects of her culture, which have affect the country's development are intolerance, lack of patriotism, poor attitude to time and a culture of corruption among others. In this contribution we focus on the last two of these many factors.

The Nigerian attitude to time and the culture of corruption which we will discuss shortly as aspects of the Nigerian way of life are as a matter of fact unacceptable as standards for conducting affairs. Infact, in Nigeria there are institutions charged with fighting corruption and there are sanctions for coming late to work. However, these institutions have not stopped the rise of corruption and indeed only lip service has been paid to sanctioning lateness to work.

The ineffectiveness of these institutions and the non-application of sanctions have emboldened those engaged in them to continue with these vices. And the truth is that these vices have become so prevalent that there is thus a sense in which we can argue that they constitute aspects of how Nigerians conduct their affairs. Infact Nigeria has continued to slip "down the slope of corruption and its rating is getting worse" (Akinrinade, 2009:5). Euphemisms such as "settlement", "family support", "season's greetings" and the like have been used to water down the damaging impact of corruption (Audu, 2008).

Case Studies

As it has been argued over and over, time is of the essence. Therefore, any country that must develop must have a time keeping culture. Time seems available but it is largely perishable, once it is gone you can't get it back. This seems to be at the heart of the Nigerian development crisis, saddled with a leadership that has no development culture, Nigeria has remained a faltering nation after over 47 years of its existence. Coupled with this is what we categorize as a culture of corruption. These two have largely frustrated development in the country.

The Japanese example which we gave earlier shows the vital link between culture and development. The summary of it may be stated thus, Japanese ethics, moral and a code of honour helped the transformation of that country to what it is today. Let us recall that Japan as a country is blessed with no natural resources. This is in contrast to the Nigeria which is blessed with natural resources. However, Nigeria has failed in the task of harnessing her abundant resources.

We now turn to the case studies proper for a detailed elaboration.

(A) The Nigerian Attitude to Time

Peter Enahoro is widely respected for his humorous nay satirical comments on Nigerians and their way of life. This he has done in his books, *The Complete Nigerian and How to be a Nigerian*. In chapter 6 of the first book, he gives a narrative on the Nigerian attitude to time. Let us acquaint ourselves with this narrative *in extenso*.

The man who fabricated the saying, 'time and tide wait for no man' must have led a sheltered life. He never met the *Complete Nigerian*. Otherwise, he would have known that throughout history time has always stood around and respectfully waited for the *Complete Nigerian*.

I have no information about the coming and going of tides, but it would hardly surprise me to learn that the *Complete Nigerian* has found a way around that as well.

We have a thing called 'Nigeria Time' which has no respect for man-made homological devices, Nigerian time is embedded in the Nature and has been around since time began. Its charm is that its accuracy is regulated by individual whims and ego.

If a *Complete Nigerian* invites you to dinner for 8pm do not disgrace yourself by arriving promptly at 8pm. Such behaviour will tell him that you are not a man to be reckoned with or, as we say in Nigeria, that you are not a 'big man'. After all, you do not want to give your host the impression that you have nothing better to do.

Be careful to turn up late. That is what the self-respecting *Complete Nigerian* would do.

At any rate, dinner will not be ready for 8pm your hostess, your host, the domestic help, the children, the extended family, and other guest expect you to be late since they will themselves be late everyone is operating on Nigerian time, which is never ahead of the mechanical clock:

Indeed, our friend who coined the maxim about time and tide would have been surprised to find to what extent the *Complete Nigerian* is highly sensitive about his arrivals and departures being regulated by the clock. He even carries this resentment unto death. ask any officiating priest or Imam how often *Complete Nigerians* who have passed on are late to arrive at the stated time of their own funeral.

If you are one of those strange Nigerians who keep faith with the mechanical clock and you arrive for a dinner appointment on schedule, your *Complete Nigerian* host will think you are greedy. At least he will regard you with suspicion.

'Hasn't he got any food in his own house?' he will whisper in self-defense to his harassed wife, who is yet to have her hair washed. The women may even round on him behind your back for having as they say, useless friends.

This nonchalant attitude to time has been one of the major factors that has frustrated development in the country. It is clear from the narrative that the average nigerian has no respect for time and considering the importance of time and especially its perishable quality, it is no wonder that Nigeria has failed to develop after about fifty years of independence. *African Time*, which means lateness to work and functions, has been elevated to the status of norm. it may be difficult to quantify the crisis this has engendered. Suffice it to say that it has been telling. This leads us to a discussion on corruption.

(B) The Culture of Corruption(?)

The problem of corruption in Nigeria is one that has remained intractable and it has greatly hindered development efforts in the country. In fact it has been argued over and over that corruption has become institutionalized in the country. (Saliu and Aremu, 2004, (Egwemi, 2007).

Corruption in Nigeria has become so alarming and systematic that it has assumed the dimension of an epidemic. This scenario qualifies Nigeria to belong to the category of countries which Jeremy Pope classifies as "those whose national integrity system has effectively collapsed" (in Omotola, n.d:3).

In this contribution, we focus on the problems of corruption generally but specifically on the *political aspect* of corruption. The problem of corruption in Nigeria seems to have defied solution! According to Mundt and Aborishade, (2004, 707) "each political regime comes to power promising to eliminate the practice and punish offenders, only to fall into the same pattern". It could be that the "defiance" of corruption-n has to do with the difficulty of defining it. Agbese (1992) has shown that the problem of defining corruption is affected by the culture of the people especially of Africa. Citing Odekunle the argument is that "although the ubiquity of corruption is otherwise acknowledged, its magnitude and character are defined by different social and cultural contexts and time dimensions" (1992:9).

Five kinds of corruption have been identified by Otite namely political corruption, economic corruption, bureaucratic corruption, judicial corruption and moral corruption. All the five kinds of corruption "run at full throttle in Nigeria" (Tell Editorial February 20, 2006:18).

Of all the five types of corruption, we focus specifically on political corruption. The argument we make here is that *political corruption is the lunch pin around which all the other forms of corruption revolve in*

a democratic dispensation. Cubbins (in Agbaje, 2004:80) conceives of political corruption as the use of public office in a way that forsakes the public interest: measured in terms of mass opinion, elite opinion or both in order that some form of personal advantage may be achieved at the expense of that public interest.

Political corruption can also be seen as any undue influence exerted in pursuit of whatever interest because it bends the rules and forces the system to serve those interests anything done to influence another in order to take undue advantage of certain situations. It is misuse of state or official power for self gain at the detriment of public interest in contravention of one's oath of office (Agbaje, 2004, Agbese, 1992). In short, political corruption is about abuse of power/office.

As I have argued elsewhere, political corruption is the least *recognized* form of corruption (Egwemi, 2007). More often emphasis is on bribery, misappropriation, diversion, embezzlement and misuse of public funds and infrastructure. These easily *recognizable* forms of corruption only take root and thrive in the face of abuse of office/power.

In fact if the truth should be told (about political corruption) one discovers that:

The moral dilemma for all societies is that position at every level of human society, confer privileges on those holding them. Privileges are also meant to be enjoyed as part of the perks of the positions so occupied. But the exploitation or enjoyment of these privileges tends to affect the system. When the system is affected, it has been corrupted. That is why power and money are the greatest corrupting influences in society (Agbese, 1992:15).

The point of this discussion on political corruption is that it is the lynchpin around which other forms of corruption revolve (Egwemi, 2007). The danger of political corruption especially as exhibited under the Obasanjo regime is that it robs the people of the right to choose their own leaders. The implication of which is that since the "leaders" are not chosen by the people, they do not owe them accountability. This sets the stage for economic corruption. The revelations that have emerged after Obasanjo's departure from the Presidency show clearly that in spite of the avowed position of his government to fight corruption, corruption thrived almost unhindered under him (Orngu, 2006). For example the chilling revelations concerning the \$16 billion power sector scandal has left many Nigerians confused (see NewsWatch March 31, 2008). All the monies expended on fake power contacts would have helped to stabilize the power sector and consequently helped Nigerian business to grow. This brings to mind Peter Eigen's submission on corruption. In his own words:

Corruption doesn't just line the pockets of political and business elite; it leaves ordinary people without essential services such as life-saving medicines and deprives them of access to sanitation and housing. In short, corruption costs lives (in Orngu, 2006:25).

While arguing that there is a culture of corruption in Nigeria, we wish to make it clear that such a culture is not sanctioned by many people. That is, that it is not an accepted situation (Gyekye, 2003). However, it seems clear that most leaders since the country's independence seem to have been more inclined to this culture of corruption than they were averse to it.

The two Nigerian case studies that we have examined show clearly that the country's culture has been a major hindrance to development. A culture of corruption combined with one of disdain for the fleeting quality of time is one that will surely frustrate even the most genuine and well thought out development effort(s).

CONCLUSION

The core argument of this paper is that culture which means a people's way of life plays a major role in the development aspirations of any people. This paper has focused on two aspects of *Nigerian culture which* have frustrated her development efforts. The paper has made the point that there is urgent need for change in these identified areas, a need for cultural re-orientation, so that the urgently needed development, which seems to have eluded the country can be achieved.

The way and manner Nigerians have conducted their affairs that is Nigerians culture has completely failed the country thus far. This is inspite of the fact that the country is richly blessed in natural resource. There is need to change the culture of impunity that seems to have defined leadership and followership in Nigeria over the past fifty years. This will be the only sure way of achieving development in the country. For culture and development to achieve that critical synergy in Nigeria, the country's culture has to change to reflect a combination of the protestant ethic and a Japanese style ethic, morality and code of honour. Also, the values of tolerance, dialogue and consultation need to be imbibed – especially given Nigeria's heterogeneity – so that the good that inhere in these values as they relate to development can be derived.

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